

The making of a glass slipper: Exploring patterns of inclusion and exclusion in a feminized profession

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Abstract:

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to deploy the concept of the “glass slipper” to unpack the construction of systematic patterns of inclusion and exclusion along the lines of gender, age and class in the emerging, female-dominated profession of psychological counselling in Russia.

Design/methodology/approach

The study draws on an analysis of 26 in-depth qualitative interviews with practising counsellors in Russia.

Findings

Drawing on the glass slipper concept, the article demonstrates how seemingly neutral discursive “rules” of professional conduct articulated by counsellors create an association between a collective professional identity and the social identities of typical practitioners, making this profession appear most suitable for middle-aged, middle-class women. The findings also show how certain embodied identities – in this case masculinity – may be able to “fit” into a slipper that was not made for them.

Originality/value

The paper extends the understanding of the dynamics of inequality patterns in a feminized profession in the Russian context by unveiling previously underexplored patterns of marginalization along the lines of class and age. It also strengthens the collective-associative view of occupational identity and extends the glass slipper concept by exposing the mechanisms of body-work association in this profession and demonstrating that certain identity characteristics may be more universally privileged in the construction of professional identities.

Keywords:

Discourse of professionalism, Feminized profession, Glass slipper, Inequality, Professional identity, Russia

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Introduction

This paper draws on the concept of the “glass slipper” (Ashcraft, 2013) to explore the emergence of inclusion and exclusion patterns in the female-dominated profession of psychological counselling in post-socialist Russia. Although professions tend to be associated with objectivity and meritocracy, research has demonstrated that, historically, they have exhibited various forms of segregation (see Witz, 1992; Davies, 1996). Whilst formal exclusion is largely a thing of the past as a result of anti-discriminatory regulation, evidence suggests that inequality patterns persist in most professions, albeit more subtly, indicating the need for more sophisticated frameworks for understanding contemporary occupational segregation (see, e.g. Bolton and Muzio, 2008; Le Feuvre, 2009; Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012; Riska, 2008; Williams, 2013). In her recent paper, Karen Ashcraft (2013) has suggested that understanding how individual and collective occupational identities are reciprocally linked may be a fruitful lens through which to explore the complexities of contemporary professional segregation (p. 6). She argues that collective occupational identities (or central characteristics of an occupation) are associated with the embodied social identities of their practitioners – actual and/or figurative. Such alignment makes occupations appear “suited for certain people and implausible to others” (Ashcraft, 2013, pp. 7-8). Ashcraft introduced the glass slipper concept to capture the systematic nature of such (dis)advantage. This paper aims to strengthen and extend this framework. Through exploration of the discursive “rules” of professional conduct perpetuated by counsellors, I unveil the construction of a collective occupational identity in the emerging profession of psychological counselling in Russia, and show how such constructions translate into dynamic inclusion and exclusion patterns along the lines of gender, age and class.

For several reasons, the Russian counselling profession represents an interesting context for such exploration. First, Ashcraft (2013) suggests that the alignment of occupations with particular embodied social identities typically happens as they professionalize (Larson, 1977); and over time, such body-work association comes to be seen as “natural”. Counselling in Russia is a new profession still searching for an identity and undergoing professionalization, which makes it an excellent focus for improving our understanding of the underlying mechanisms and consequences of the construction of a collective occupational identity by association. Second, since the glass slipper concept was developed from studies of occupational segregation in the Anglophone context, applying it to explore professional inequalities in Russia may help test its analytical capacity to capture patterns of inclusion and exclusion in a setting in which the history and institutional structures of professions are different from their Anglo-American counterparts (Balzer, 1996; Svensson and Evetts, 2010). Finally, in light of the internalization and globalization of professions, analysis of the post-state socialist context may advance our knowledge of cross-cultural patterns of inequality in professional work, thus responding to recent calls to improve our understanding of the exclusionary nature of professionalism beyond the Anglo-American setting (Bourgeault *et al.*, 2009).

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on professional segregation in several ways. First, it strengthens the collective-associative view of the nature of professions (Ashcraft, 2013) by extending our understanding of the mechanisms of alignment of particular embodied social identities and a collective occupational identity. Drawing on the glass slipper concept, I demonstrate how seemingly neutral discursive rules of professional conduct relating to training, expertise and professional commitment translate into the construction of a

collective occupational identity that privileges middle-aged, middle-class, female identities, thus perpetuating the current demographics of this profession. I also show that masculine identity allows one to be somewhat exempt from some of the constraints of the collective occupational identity. My findings extend Ashcraft's (2013) framework in two ways. First, I suggest that, in order to unpack the mechanisms of the body-work association, it may be useful to scrutinize the construction of professional conduct in addition to social characteristics that are seen as "required" for the job. Second, I argue that certain embodied identities – in this case masculinity – may be better able to adjust to and "fit" a slipper that was not made for them, calling for further exploration of the mechanisms and conditions that enable them to do so. Finally, the paper advances current research on segregation patterns in the context of post-socialist professions (Harden, 2001; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov, 2009; Metcalfe and Afanassieva, 2005; Riska and Novelskaite, 2011) by revealing how age and class dimensions modify the meanings of gender, resulting in more nuanced patterns of inclusion and exclusion within this female-dominated field.

The paper proceeds with a discussion of the glass slipper framework in relation to the Russian context. Following a brief outline of the background of the counselling profession in Russia and my research methodology, I proceed with an analysis of the construction of a collective occupational identity by unpacking three discursive "rules of professionalism" and their effects. The concluding section situates the findings in relation to Ashcraft's (2013) framework and current debates on exclusion and inclusion in professional work.

Theorizing from the glass slipper in a Russian context

Recent research attempting to understand contemporary patterns of professional exclusion and inclusion has highlighted mechanisms through which occupations come to acquire a particular demographic composition and nature, e.g. "feminized", and how this results in the marginalization of certain identities (Adams, 2010; Bolton and Muzio, 2008; Griffin and Karepova, 2011; Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012; Riska, 2008; Witz, 1990). Whilst much research has typically focused on structural factors that determine occupational segregation, Ashcraft (2013) has recently argued that, in order to gain a more dynamic view of inclusion and exclusion, it is important to highlight how individual embodied identities and the nature of work are reciprocally associated. Specifically, she suggests that occupations acquire a particular "collective occupational identity" through their alignment with the embodied social identities of their practitioners. Such alignment may be physical and/or symbolic; that is, "bodies real and imagined [may be] invoked as figurative practitioners to construct the nature of occupations" (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 9). The explicit body-work association then tends to fade, making an occupation seem "naturally fit" for some individuals but not others; these associations are not fixed and may be transformed, e.g. through changing discourses. Ashcraft (2013) introduced the metaphor of the glass slipper to capture "how occupations come to appear, by nature, possessed of central enduring and distinctive characteristics that make them suited to certain people and implausible for others" (p. 7). This metaphor emphasizes the systematic nature of the (dis)advantage resulting from the body-work association: created with the wave of an invisible wand, the slipper is fit only for Cinderella and it is impossible for others to "fake" the fit.

There are several reasons why this framework may be useful for making sense of inclusion and exclusion patterns in the Russian counselling profession. Occupational segregation in the Anglo-American context is typically explored in relation to institutional structures of

professionalism and the pursuit of “closure” by professions (Davies, 1996; Cavanagh, 2003; Larson, 1977; Witz, 1990, 1992). However, historical and structural differences in the Russian professional context mean that professionalization does not occur here in the same way: professionals are typically state employees, and the state tightly controls most professional matters (Balzer, 1996; Svensson and Evetts, 2010). Understanding of professionalism in the post-socialist context also differs: it is not perceived as a system of work organization in the “traditional” Anglo-American sense, but is defined in relation to the personality-oriented traits, individual values and behaviour required for the job (Mansurov and Yurchenko, 2010; Sanghera and Iliasov, 2008; Riska and Novelskaite, 2011). Although the glass slipper framework was developed drawing on the Anglo-American professional setting, it emphasizes that the relationship between professional structures and individual identities is not uni-directional but is “temporarily fixed through discursive struggle” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 22). In fact, elsewhere Ashcraft et al. (2012) conceptualize professionalization as a branding activity or “strategic occupational identity work” – a view that emphasizes discourse as a crucial mechanism that (re)creates professional structures. From this perspective, analysis of professional inequalities may be tied to institutional structures but does not have to begin with their exploration, which potentially makes theorizing from the glass slipper better suited to understanding the Russian professional context.

Another advantage of using this concept is the possibility of exposing more nuanced patterns of professional segregation. Extant studies on professions in Russia focus mainly on issues of gender segregation and feminization (Griffin and Karepova, 2011; Harden, 2001; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov, 2009; Metcalfe and Afanassieva, 2005). One issue of such theorization is that it obscures the complexity of experiences of exclusion and inclusion. For instance, recent studies indicate that professional inequalities vary when different social categories, such as class, race, gender, sexuality and so on are at work together (Adams, 1998; Price-Glynn and Rakovski, 2012; Williams, 2013). Ashcraft (2013) argues that, because the glass slipper draws on an embodied and therefore more holistic view of social identities, this framework allows the possibility of accounting for how various social categories are mutually dependent and co-constructive in the process of occupational identity formation (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 9). Theorizing from the glass slipper may therefore help not simply to expose how professions become “feminized”, but also to unveil more subtle contours of segregation, exposing the experiences of different categories of women in the Russian counselling profession. The next section provides an overview of the development of counselling in Russia and its structural and demographic features that are relevant for further analysis.

The profession of psychological counselling in Russia

Psychological counselling was banned in Russia until 1989 for ideological reasons, as it was seen as inherently individualistic and incompatible with socialist ideology and its collective values (see Karepova, 2010). The profession began to develop rapidly after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the number of practitioners quickly increased to tens of thousands by the mid-1990s (Yurevich, 2006). Demand for both individual counselling and psychological expertise in business organizations remains very high.

Counselling is still in the process of professionalizing, and the novelty of this profession means that it has yet to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Owing to the nature of professional structures in Russia, the two largest professional associations – the Russian

Psychological Society and the Russian Professional Psychotherapeutic League – have little influence, because professional title, terms of entry and even educational curricula are still regulated by the state. But whilst the state has established the foundations of professional practice, there is no formal assessment of counsellors' professional competence after university graduation, and professional bodies offer only voluntary certification (Manichev, 2008). According to my participants, lack of formal licensing combined with the public's lack of knowledge about the nature of counselling services means that the profession continues to suffer reputational damage from rogue practitioners and pseudo-counsellors who thrive in this deregulated field. Faced with the need to gain legitimacy and status in light of the weakness of formal professionalization efforts, counsellors perform active discursive work around the construction of "rules" of what it means to be a professional. In my analysis, I show how these rules of conduct are closely linked to the construction of a collective occupational identity.

A few more distinctive features of this profession in Russia are important for my discussion of collective identity formation. First, counselling in Russia has been female-dominated since its emergence in the early 1990s: it was one of the new occupations that appeared after the fall of the Soviet regime that were considered to be "well-suited" to women (see Griffin and Karepova, 2011 for a detailed discussion of feminization). However, in 2014 women still constituted 73 per cent of graduate students in psychology[1]. Second, counselling was and remains today one of the most popular courses amongst mature students who desire a career change and return to university to re-train for another degree (Karandashev, 2009). This means that many practitioners are middle aged. Finally, (re)training for this degree in Russia is not cheap: monthly tuition fees in Moscow ranged from £125 to £350 in 2013, whilst the average monthly salary was £700[2]. Moreover, because university curricula are mainly theoretical, counsellors have to obtain private certifications in different therapeutic approaches (Karandashev, 2009), as well as invest in establishing their practice (e.g. rent, advertising, etc.). Thus, counselling remains primarily the domain of a relatively well-off middle class. As I show in the analysis, these characteristics are closely linked to the discourses of professionalism and the construction of a collective occupational identity.

Methodology

In her theorization of the glass slipper, Ashcraft (2013) identifies "discursive struggle" as the main constitutive mechanism that enables and supports collective occupational identity construction. In line with this theorization, this paper aims to observe how the contours of collective professional identity emerge in the narratives of members of the professional community because, as Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) argue, the narratives of personal experience contribute greatly to the construction of the broader institutional discourse of professional identity. Ashcraft (2013) argues that the nature of collective occupational identities is malleable, yet she offers little indication of how to begin to unpack the body-work alignment underpinning these constructions. In fact, she suggests that the body-work association is typically seen as natural, obscuring the link. This is exemplified in my data: most of my interviewees did not explicitly articulate the "nature" of counselling, suggesting that it is a profession suited to anyone. Therefore, since recent research has highlighted the central role of the discourse of professionalism in shaping professional identities (Fournier, 1999; Ashcraft, 2007), in order to unveil the "magic" behind the construction of the glass slipper and reveal the body-work link, I have chosen to focus my analysis on scrutinizing the construction of the meaning of professionalism and the rules of professional conduct.

My sample consisted of 26 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Russian counsellors in Moscow (capital city) and Vladivostok (smaller provincial city). Sampling techniques were determined by the fact that there is no official directory of counsellors in Russia: participants were recruited through personal e-mail invitations via professional web sites, and by snowballing. Combining these two techniques resulted in a relatively diverse sample: participants worked in private and/or public-sector organizations, represented a range of therapeutic approaches and were at different levels of seniority (e.g. early career counsellors, directors of counselling centres, heads of psychology departments). The sample broadly reflected the characteristics of the profession described above. In total, three men and 23 women were interviewed, aged between 28 and 64 (average age was 42). For over two-thirds of participants, psychological counselling was their second university degree.

Interviews lasted between one and two hours; they were held in Russian and then translated into English. All accounts were anonymized and pseudonyms were given to all participants. Although the sample was relatively small (26 participants), the in-depth nature of the interviews and the interviewer's comprehensive understanding of the cultural context made it possible to map a range of views and experiences, providing unique insights into a range of specialists' understandings of professional identity.

The interviews were closely (re)read and coded around the theme discussed above – the ways in which participants talked about professionalism and the professional conduct of a good counsellor. Three main identifiable categories of “professional rules” were present in most accounts: training, expertise and calling. The analysis is structured around the construction of the glass slipper, unpacking how seemingly neutral constructions of professional conduct and characteristics underlie the alignment between certain embodied identities of practitioners and the collective occupational identity.

Rules of professionalism: the making of a glass slipper

As mentioned previously, when asked about the nature of the profession, many of my interviewees, echoing the Soviet rhetoric of equality (Kozina and Zhidkova, 2006), refused to categorize it as male or female, suggesting that “it’s not a female or a male profession. It is human” (Polina, 46)[3]. However, further in the conversation most counsellors agreed that, owing to the “caring” nature of this profession, it is probably better suited to women:

This profession is a care profession, helping profession [...] and it’s likely to be associated with certain female characteristics [...] I mean, the ability to help, to assist, to sympathize, to express empathy [...] (Oksana, 52).

As this quotation suggests, the profession is seen to be “naturally” a better “fit” for women because they already possess the necessary characteristics. Oksana’s narrative exemplifies the discursive work that strengthens the link between the “feminine” nature of this profession and the embodied identity of its typical practitioners (Ashcraft, 2013). This is a relatively well-articulated link, but closer examination of the rules of professional conduct constructed by the counsellors reveals more nuanced contours of the emerging collective occupational identity.

Infinite training

As discussed above, there is currently no formal certification or licensing in Russian counselling, and the professional community is concerned that “unqualified specialists lower the status and the prestige of the profession” (Galina, 36). This anxiety is partly addressed in

the discursive construction of professional conduct, which is associated first and foremost with taking continuous professional development (CPD) seriously:

[In] this profession one has to study constantly, to upgrade qualification [...] You cannot avoid it because otherwise you are going to be a poor specialist. It is a professional necessity, part of the job (Alexandra, 42).

Alexandra's quote indicates that constant and extensive training is constructed as an intrinsic part of counsellors' work and is a trait of professionalism. When mentioning training, the counsellors referred to a variety of courses in therapeutic methods which are typically offered by private centres and agencies. All of my participants reported engaging in a significant amount of such CPD:

I don't remember a single year of my life when I didn't attend some professional workshop, training or a seminar [...] You finish one workshop and start packing for the next one [...] Because that's what this profession is like (Marina, 43).

Raising educational requirements to increase legitimacy is a typical element of professionalization in the Anglophone context (Cavanagh, 2003; Macdonald, 1995). Interestingly, Russian counsellors normalize the obligation to undergo CPD, despite a lack of any legal requirement to do so and an absence of any centralized system of credit recognition for these courses. This suggests that training in this context means more than just updating qualifications. Fournier (1999, p. 286) notes that, in addition to the amount of knowledge, the criterion used to define competence and professionalism may be conceptualized in terms of appropriate professional conduct. Without formal "markers" of professionalism (e.g. licensing), the very process of constant training becomes conduct that signifies professionalism and belonging to a professional community.

Although this informal norm of conduct is not visibly linked to any particular social characteristics, when placed in the broader social and economic context, it becomes clear that it does determine the subtle contours of occupational identity. Given that CPD courses typically last from a few days to several years and may be as expensive as a university degree, attending them is not simply a matter of choice: only those who are already relatively well off, e.g. on a middle-class income, can afford to follow this rule and be "good professionals". Those with more established practices might also meet this criterion of professionalism, but at the expense of a considerable reduction in income. Consistent with the male breadwinner ideology dominant in Russia (Kozina and Zhidkova, 2006; Posadskaya, 1994), earning less is considered more "suitable" for women. Women are "allowed" to rely on their partners' money. At least half of my interviewees said that they were only able to pursue this career thanks to support from their husbands. Therefore, constructed as an inseparable part of a professional identity, this informal norm of professional conduct reflects and reinforces the shape of the glass slipper – an alignment of the collective occupational identity of counselling with its figurative and, in this case, actual practitioners whose embodied identity lies at an intersection of gender and class. Obscured by the rhetoric of equality and professionalism, as described above, this implicit alignment makes this profession less "fit", albeit inadvertently, for those who cannot afford to maintain such professional conduct, such as younger and less well-off individuals.

Interestingly, there is an exception to this rule. For instance, my interviewees said that it is understandable that men may do less training since they "need to provide for the family"

(Raisa, 64). Less training is also justified by men's "preference" for focusing on one specialism:

It's like, they [men] are more deep in studying things [...] They go deeper into one therapy instead [of learning different therapies] (Natalya, 29).

Hence, the prevalent gender ideology of a male breadwinner (Posadskaya, 1994) and professional circumstances, i.e. low number of men in this profession, seems to offer them "an out" from this rule and allows men to "fit" a slipper that was not initially made for them.

Expertise and age

The next rule of professionalism relates to "expertise and experience" (Irina, 56). This appears to articulate with the counsellors' desire to raise the status of the profession, since increasing demonstrable expertise is typically used to raise professional legitimacy and status (Macdonald, 1995). However, in Russian counselling, expertise does not appear to be linked to scientific knowledge alone, but to a very much embodied characteristic – one's age. When my interviewees talked about low-quality specialists, they were referring mainly to young counsellors:

[There are] a lot of inexperienced youngsters who are willing to try out their skills in counseling [...] This can be really harmful, you know (Oksana, 52).

Of course, it's ridiculous if a 20-year-old junior tries to advise a mother about relationship issues with her 17-year old child [...] (Galina, 36).

These quotations suggest that biological age is constructed as a measure of professional (in)experience. Curiously, because many people re-train to become counsellors, a "young" counsellor (in terms of experience of practicing therapy) may, in fact, be middle-aged. However, the professionalism of mature students is not questioned because they are seen to have life experience:

Age matters a lot in this profession. You have to have your own life experience to be a good specialist (Anna, 53).

Thus, biological age is discursively normalized by counsellors as a required professional characteristic because it is equated with life experience, and hence with professional experience and competence. Such a "measure" of professionalism is further justified by highlighting clients' preferences for older counsellors. This was rather un-reflexively reproduced by most counsellors, who admitted that a middle-aged woman has a definite advantage in this profession. This alignment of a certain age and gender with professionalism means that the glass slipper of the collective occupational identity does not quite "fit" young individuals. Although this does not legally debar them, my interviews suggest that it does impact on their opportunities. For instance, most directors of counselling centres in my sample said they prefer not to employ young specialists.

But whilst this rule clearly underlies an association between gender, age and collective occupational identity, as in the case of the training, there is an exception: owing to the scarcity of men, young male counsellors are less affected by the constraints of occupational identity demands than young women:

I have now eight women working with me and I really want to employ at least one man, well, a young man because for this salary you won't find an experienced specialist (Alexandra, 46).

Alexandra's view is typical of the directors of counselling centres in my sample, indicating that patterns of marginalization are intersectional, i.e. the rule of expertise does not affect all categories of women and men equally, and the glass slipper is not equally unfit for all young candidates. The context of the labour market seems to create conditions under which certain characteristics, in this case masculinity, enable them to "fit" a glass slipper that was not made for them.

Calling and commitment

Finally, the third discursive "rule" of professionalism suggests that to be a good professional one needs to have a calling for this profession:

In [some professions] it is possible to just learn how to do it to be a good professional [...] I think that counselling is different [...] It's not enough. For most people this profession is a vocation, a calling (Tamara, 48).

This quotation implies that professionalism is more than just learning; it is about having a calling. The rhetoric of calling as a signifier of commitment and professionalism features in other professions, such as teaching, clergy and medicine (see, e.g. Cavanagh, 2003). Having a calling in counselling was associated with "an all-encompassing devotion to work" and focusing "on the intrinsic rewards of work which transcend the monetary rewards" (Shuval and Bernstein, 1996, p. 966):

I can't say psychology is a business [...] If I wanted to be a wealthy person I would have done something else. Counselling was my calling [...] (Nadezhda, 42).

I think that the advantage of such financially difficult conditions [of work] is that only those people who are meant to be in this profession, for whom counselling is a true calling, only those will stay (Polina, 46).

The above quotations indicate that not prioritizing monetary rewards signifies professionalism. Rejection of rewards, albeit often rhetorical, is argued to create a more selfless image of the profession and raise its status (see Parsons, 1951). But who can afford to be professional on these terms? As previously mentioned, education and setting up a practice are already costly, and many counsellors do several jobs to earn a good living. However, when put in the context of the dominant professional demographics, this rule becomes unsurprising; the majority of practitioners tend to be relatively well-off, middle-class women who can "afford" to have a calling. As this interviewee said:

I have never been in a situation where I would have to provide for the family [...] This profession [...] I just really like it. I think it's really my calling (Ludmila, 47).

Hence, as middle-class women are in a better position to follow this rule of financial altruism, a seemingly "neutral" rule of calling serves to reinforce the association of these classed identities of the typical practitioner with the collective occupational identity of counselling, making it appear less "suitable" for working class or/and younger, less established specialists.

Similarly to previous rules, this alignment of professionalism with attitudes to financial reward seems to apply mainly to women. Once again, particular cultural conditions, i.e. being

viewed as primary “breadwinners” (Kozina and Zhidkova, 2006; Posadskaya, 1994), as well as labour market conditions where men are a scarce and, therefore, valuable resource, enable men to be somewhat exempt from the constraints of the collective occupational identity. This context legitimates their pursuit of higher salaries and means that men are not deprecated for putting financial goals first. As Tamara (48) said: “Men need to find ways, niches to make more money because they have to provide for the family”. Hence, despite the fact that the collective occupational identity has come to be associated mainly with middle-class, middle-aged women, in most cases men may still “fit” this seemingly unsuitable glass slipper.

Concluding discussion

Through the use of the glass slipper metaphor, this paper has aimed to reveal the construction of subtle but persistent patterns of segregation in the Russian counselling profession. Drawing on Ashcraft’s (2013) theorization and the analysis of discursive “rules” of professionalism, I have demonstrated the construction of an implicit alignment between the gendered, classed and aged identities of typical practitioners and a collective occupational identity in Russian counselling.

The paper’s findings develop the collective associative view in a number of ways. To begin with, they demonstrate that the glass slipper metaphor clearly has analytical purchase in exploring the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion beyond the Anglo-American context. Specifically, Ashcraft’s (2013) conceptualization of a “discursive struggle” as a central mechanism of identity construction allows this lens to be applied to professional contexts such as those in Russia, where institutional structures of professionalism differ. Analysis of discursive rules of professionalism and a focus on explicating the body-work association has made it possible to show how the contours of the glass slipper are constructed. By discursively linking the collective occupational identity to the embodied social identities of the majority group of practitioners who are able to follow the rules of professional conduct, the profession comes to be seen as “naturally” better suited to a particular social group – middle-aged, middle-class women.

Ashcraft (2013) also suggests that the metaphor “captures how the identity of work may draw attention to features that favour certain practitioners but have little to do with actual work” (p. 16). This has clearly been exemplified in my analysis, for instance in the case of the rather un-reflexive association of age and professionalism. Ashcraft argues that the glass slipper may be strategically configured in the process of professionalization (see also Cavanagh, 2003; Witz, 1992). However, since the pursuit of formal professionalization in Russian counselling is currently half-hearted, construction of the body-work association in this profession seems to be a more diffuse rather than strategic process. Yet, interestingly, the rules of professionalism in the Russian context seem to be linked to elements, such as expertise, education and altruistic behaviours, that are judged able to raise professional status in the Anglo-American context as well (Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1995), indicating similarities in the work of discourses of professionalism in various cultural contexts, despite differences in institutional structures.

This paper’s analysis goes beyond the current theorization of professional inequality patterns in Russia, which focuses mainly on feminization (Harden, 2001; Iarskaia-Smirnova et al., 2004; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov, 2009; Metcalf and Afanassieva, 2005; Riska and Novelskaite, 2011). In theorizing from the glass slipper, I unveil further complexity in the patterns of (dis)advantage within this feminized profession, demonstrating that although

women are seen as more “suited” to this profession, this privilege is not the same for all categories of women, but differs with other identity characteristics such as age and class. My findings also raise a question about the analysis of less visible identity characteristics. Whilst age and gender are fairly visible characteristics of “typical” practitioners, class is a more subtle category and my analysis shows that it is only revealed when the rules of professional conduct are observed as embedded in a wider social context. This suggests the need for further interrogation of how the glass slipper metaphor can capture the mechanisms of body-work association when certain embodied characteristics are not necessarily “immediately recognizable” (Ashcraft, 2013).

Finally, I have argued that, although the construction of a glass slipper indeed renders particular embodied identities “typical” and therefore more suitable for the job, there seem to be exceptions to the rule. Ashcraft (2013, p. 16) writes that it is difficult to “fake” a fit with the slipper “for those whose embodied social identities do not readily align with those used to construct the identity of work”; however, my findings show that particular identity characteristics – in my case masculinity – seem to enable one to fit a slipper not initially purpose made. I have shown how particular social, cultural and labour market conditions assist in exempting men from the constraints of the collective occupational identity. These findings raise a question of whether certain identities may always be slightly better suited to professional work in general, and indicate the need for further theorization of the mechanisms and conditions that enable such identity categories to fit various moulds of collective occupational identities.

In conclusion, my exploration of the Russian counselling profession lends weight to and develops further the associative view of collective occupational identity (Ashcraft, 2013), suggesting that such theorizing, indeed, allows us to produce a more complex understanding of persistent inequalities in professional workplaces, but also indicating the need to explore further the analytical capacity of the glass slipper concept to account for whether certain identities may fit a variety of slippers not initially made for them. Analyzing professional exclusion and inclusion in this way unveils a wider range of people’s diverse experiences of professional work, and may help us understand the limitations of equality legislation which draws on single identity markers such as gender (see, e.g. Kuhlmann and Bourgeault, 2008; Le Feuvre, 2009) by making us more attentive to the fact that such policies may not benefit everyone in the target category and/or may continue to perpetuate the reproduction of more subtle contours of exclusion.

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Notes

- Higher School of Economics data www.hse.ru/primarydata/io2013 (accessed 20 January 2015).
- State Statistics Committee data (www.gks.ru) (accessed 20 January 2015).
- All interviewees were given pseudonyms; the number following the name signifies age.